

# **The Postmodern Application of Holistic Education**

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*ABSTRACT: Traditionally, three major paradigms underpin educational theories: an existential-phenomenological, an empirical-analytical, and a critical dialectic-materialistic (Schrool & van den Berg, 1995). This paper focuses on a fourth one: the paradigm of holistic education. In postmodern times, it seamlessly underpins poststructuralism and postconstructivism. The former insists on social justice and deconstruction. The latter focuses on how individuals actively interpret and transform experiences and knowledge. Both positions commonly bolster a new way of educating that focuses on inclusion of the most vulnerable of society, collaboration between teachers and students and emancipation and self-advocacy of each individual human being and mankind. It embraces a novel philosophy wherein a different learning emerges in which the individual human being is transformed by its organic interconnection with the totality of mankind and nature.*

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## **Introduction**

Traditionally, three major paradigms uphold educational theories: an existential-phenomenological, an empirical-analytical, and a critical dialectic-materialistic (Schrool & van den Berge, 1995). This paper focuses on a fourth one: the paradigm of holistic education. This paradigm is essential for education and embraces the pioneering work of Claparède (1919), Dewey (1922), Ferrière (1922), Parkhurst (1924), Decroly (1930), Piaget (1954), and Neill (1983), relative to their active and practical way of educating in the interests of children. In postmodern times, it seamlessly underpins poststructuralism and postconstructivism. The former concentrates on social justice and deconstruction, with representatives such as Foucault, Derrida and Bataille. The latter, with Bohm and Miller, focuses on how individuals actively interpret and transform experiences and knowledge.

### ***The 'classic paradigms***

The empirical—analytical movement strives for knowledge and clarity. It seeks to empirically test statements of reality. It looks for objective and verifiable conclusions. Hypotheses are deduced, tested and either accepted, or rejected. One limits oneself to facts and to what can be corroborated. The tested knowledge then forms the basis of educational practice. Discernible behavior is separate from the underlying 'black box': 'Man *as* machine'. Within education, this paradigm can be recognized in remedial teaching, cognitive development and sensory training, behavior modification approaches, standardized testing and predictive assessment of multiple risks of behavior disorders. Man is caught in a web of causal links. He is an evidence-based product.

The existential—phenomenological paradigm strives towards meaningful action and understanding. Man, as a subjective being with his own story, is situated in the meeting with the *Other*, in the heart of existence. The essence of reality cannot be perceived directly, but its manifestation - the phenomena - can be interpreted and thus understood. The meeting with the other leads to meaningful dialogue, action and self-realization. Education is seen as a process: 'Man *as* story'. Within education, this paradigm leads to human encounters in which we try to understand the other by expressive communication and imagination. Importance is given to touching, caring, living, eating, playing, learning, talking together, writing to each other, and so on, resulting in humanistic education and psychology.

The critical dialectic-materialistic orientation strives for social justice and believes that structural intervention is a condition necessary to its attainment. Language and thought are social products. There is a connection between thought and production, between trade and science, between practice and theory. Human labor leads to emancipation and discourages alienation. Man must free himself from the social structures which detract him from his development and strive for the well-being of all. Man as an individual is secondary to communal ideology: 'Man *as* societal structure'. Within education, this paradigm leads to safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and guards against routine in institutions. Disability, for example, is considered as the result of social injustice and challenged through inclusion, emancipation and empowerment of the most vulnerable (Broekaert et al., 2004).

### ***The holistic paradigm***

*As the same thing in us are living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old.*

(Diels & Kranz, 1985)

*The Beautiful, contemplated in its essentials, that is, in kind and not in degree, is that in which the many, still seen as many, becomes one.*

(Coleridge, 1814)

Holism recognizes the unity and connectedness of things, in contrast to compartmentalization and dichotomies. Holistic Education looks for a common denominator from 'Man as machine', 'Man as story' and 'Man as societal structure'. Physicist, Fritjof Capra (1982) describes holism as the understanding of reality in terms of integrated parts, whose characteristics are not reduced to smaller units. A holistic approach believes in the two propositions that, the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and that everything is connected; therefore a living organism cannot be reduced to its physical parts. The opposing terms, 'sum' and 'parts', are in fact misleading, because holism is primarily concerned with the intrinsic relationship between sum and parts. According to physicist, David Bohm (1985) this implicit reality, the implicate or unfolding order, cannot easily be known, although we can acquire some consciousness of it. In other words, the sum of reality and its relation to the parts is not easily captured by our human thought processes. An example is the difficulty we have in grasping that, in reality, we are both babies who are born and old people who die. As a consequence, one cannot exist without the other, and this surpasses our individuality (Buber, 1959; Rucker, 1986). In the holistic approach, this question of togetherness — of *I* and the *Other*, of Person and Community—is described in terms of complementarity: that One and Many can be considered as two simultaneous sides of the same coin (Wielemans, 1993). This is called the principle of simultaneity: the One and the Many, alternatively going together are at the same time each other's, excluding aspects of reality. The, 'at the same time alternatively going together where unity is pursued' (Broekaert, D'Oosterlinck, Van Hove & Bayliss, 2004) is called the integration principle. But once a form of unity is reached, a new dialectic transformation to

another order takes place. We call this the transformation principle. All of this means that *I* and the *Other*, Person and Community, simultaneously co-exist, strive through integration for unity, but dissipate and transform the now closed system into a new open one.

This change means that the system as a whole thus shifts to a new, more complex structural form whose parts are governed by a novel set of functional properties and characterized by a different set of statistical parameters (Brent, 1978, p. 380). The resulting dynamic process includes cycles of disorganization and transformation of activities, meanings, self-development and relations (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002, p. 800). The incomprehensible course of transformation can leave the individual in distress, as it denies absolute certainties. This can be referred to as the uncertainty principle. In a sense man is not made as a fact that exists, but as a tendency to exist: as uncertain as it is certain (Heisenberg, 1962). According to Capra (1991), it was the Greek philosophers, such as Democritos, who countered the universal principle of Heracleitos, who saw the world as permanently in change through an interwoven cyclic and dyadic process, which drew a sharp line between spirit and matter. The power of the spirit moved the dead matter. And the spirit was associated with the Divine power. When Kant (DATE) declared that the human subject itself constituted the categories that filtered the universe that we comprehend, he declared the *Ding an Sich* (English trans.) unknowable, and excluded the irrational. Hegel (DATE), on the other hand, saw knowing as an act, as a dynamic, dialectic movement towards the whole. By revealing contradictions one can reach a new synthesis, which can be a starting or reference point towards higher realization and self-consciousness, as an ultimate accomplishment of the whole. It is against this dialectic rising towards an ultimate accomplishment that Nietzsche (DATE) reacted. According to him, every individual can build his world without reference to absolute values that surpass the individual and make him a slave. This can be done by the will to power or a natural desire. The subject is

pulled forward to another arena as a self-organizing phenomenon, part of the organic flux of Heracleitos.

Capra (1991) has drawn together elements of an emerging view of living organisms as systems, with both internal systemic characteristics as well as interactional ones as they come in contact with other organisms. Even the simplest organisms, he points out, are self-organizing and internally flexible. No two organisms are identical and relationships even among the parts may be unique. These distinctive features enable living organisms to adapt to new situations. As they are self-organizing, they determine their own functioning, not being dependent on external forces. Thus they are able to recycle and renew themselves, a process basic to healing and maintenance of the body. Even more exceptional, Capra (1991) maintains, they are able to reach out creatively beyond physical and mental boundaries in the process of learning, development and evolution. It is this self-transcendent quality that makes creation and evolution possible. Organisms, as we know, function in patterns that are cyclical in nature, determined by positive and negative feedback loops, in contrast to machines, which operate on linear chains of cause and effect. Therefore, when a machine breaks down, the cause can be determined, and then it can be repaired. Living organisms do not operate that simply: breakdown can usually be attributed to many interrelated factors, and it is often irrelevant which of these factors was the initial cause (Capra, 1991). Such is often the grounds for stress-related conditions. Feedback then, allows the organism to maintain itself despite changes in the environment. This homeostatic principle, while pushing parts of the organism to the extreme, also protects the system from undue stress by establishing a temporary state of rigidity. Flexibility is momentarily reduced in order to preserve the integrity of the organism. However, if the source of stress is not reduced or eliminated, the organism will attempt to adapt through physiological changes. Although such adaptation is reversible, a price is paid: the organism will lose some of its flexibility as it accommodates to stress; the accumulation of

stress may eventually lead to illness. Still, it is this process of adaptation to stress that leads to the wonder of evolution itself—the potential for co-creation and self-transcendence that is inherent in all living organisms. As the organism is threatened and reorganizes itself to cope, it can lead to a higher level of complexity. “The stability of a living system is continually tested by its fluctuations,” Capra (1991, p. 287) maintains, “and at certain moments one or several of them may become so strong that they drive the system over an instability into an entirely new structure, which again will be fluctuating and relatively stable.”

## **The Postmodern approach of Holistic Education**

### ***Poststructuralism***

An important incentive to postmodernism was initiated in Europe and, especially, in France. It was explicitly influenced by Nietzsche, Rousseau, Marx, Critical Theory, the Frankfurt School, and Sartre’s pessimism. It reacted against the Kantian categorical imperative, Hegel and existentialism, and embraced Nietzsche’s anarchism, irrationalism, nihilism, skepticism and relativism (Standish, 2004). Nietzsche (DATE) saw reality as power quanta, as well as with a fractional and dynamic character, dominated by self-maintenance, submission and desires (Grimm, 1977). As, in this (mind/body) flux ontology, no absolute truth exists, values can only be studied as a genealogy (Kaufmann & Hollingdale, 1967). Inspired by Nietzsche’s (DATE) Genealogy of Morals, Foucault (1973) submitted the historical reality to the interpretation of the structures—the genealogy—of the world. He saw this interpretation as a result of a multitude of power relations, that not only were reflected in institutions such as prisons, clinics, courts, but also in subjected subject (in Latin *subicere* means submission). The subject can resist by the recollection of those repressed interpretations and overcome the

determination of structuralism. This constitutes, in essence, the reaction of postmodern thinkers who are often called poststructuralists<sup>1</sup> because they question the definite unchangeability of power structures, while they recognize the importance of language as the structuring element *par excellence* (Groot, 2003). Foucault (1988) suggested a dialectic between an active and a creative agent and a constraining field where freedom is achieved to the extent that one can overcome socially imposed limitations, and attain self-mastery and a stylized existence. But those practices of the self are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group.

Derrida (1995) wants to analyze the metaphysical construction of the world from its prevailing inherent logical characteristics looking for internal contradictions; by doing so, he resists the metaphysics with its own major weapon. He deconstructs reality, meaning that he constructs and destructs alternatively together. What is broken down is at the same time built up, albeit not always in the same manner. It transforms into another reality (Foucault, 1988). Also Bataille (1992) identifies two worlds: one of continuity and change, and the calculable world of thinking in compartments. The *I* tries to escape from the field of continuity by means of rationally controlling the world, but this is an illusion, as the *I* will inevitably dissolve into the continuity of the formless mass, as it has to surrender itself to the game of coincidence. Bataille (DATE) confronts the dark side of life and includes the desolate, lonely and despised man in an angle of coincidence.

In essence, educational poststructuralist implications concentrate on questioning social structures and institutions that leads to the exclusion of the powerless, people with disabilities, the socially excluded, and the people labeled under terms of psychotics, neurotics and character disorders. Poststructuralism reacts to hegemonistic theories that explain structural

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<sup>1</sup> Such as Derrida (1995), Foucault (1965), Levinas (1981), Deleuze (1983), and Lyotard (1984).



forces, the masters of truth and justice tend to say what others want or need (Foucault, 1977) or that block freedom and inner consciousness.

### ***Postconstructivism***

*Education flows from experience . . . Holistic education is the art of cultivating meaningful human relationships. It is a dialogue between teacher and student within a community of learners (Miller, 1997).*

Jean Piaget originally introduced constructivism in the school system (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). According to Piaget's developmental constructivism, knowledge is an active construction of the knowing person, triggered by its cognitive system's pursuit for order and stability. It is an ongoing process, in which, one actively interprets new experiences and transforms prior knowledge based on a set of working hypotheses or frames (Crebbin, 1997). Therefore, a person's knowledge is not viewed as an exact copy of reality, but as useful knowledge gained by the ability to adapt one's knowledge structures to the environment and the reverse. This constructivist move in education was mainly elaborated within the framework of the New School Movement that originally was connected with the names and work of Claparède (1919), Ferrière (1922), Freinet (1946), Parkhurst (1951), Neill (1960), Dewey (1963) and Decroly (1965). It was influenced by the rising psychoanalytic movement with proponents such as Freud (2005) (unconsciousness and dreams), Jung (2003) (archetypes and synchronicity) and Reich (1971) (bio-energetics and geneticality). Pioneering educationalists had no common ideology, did believe in love, lived for and with their children, stood for principles such as self government and shared responsibility. The school had to be an active and practical place of life in **functioning in** the interests of the children. It aimed at

the global education of the child. After the Second World War, the classic school system integrated some of this new wave's achievements, without always understanding the real meaning of them. Class councils became councils of the teachers judging the children, and no longer children's courts, in which also teachers had to defend their responsibility. The interests of children, from which teaching lessons should start, were superseded by well prepared programmes. However, many New Schools survived. Thanks to the computer and technical revolution, communication theories and the systemic approaches, constructivism became linked to postmodernism. Even if it was considered by some only as a specific trend (Kvale, 1992; McNamee & Gergen, 1992), a proliferation (Bottela, 2000) or a variety of constructivist experience (Neimeyer, 1993), it found its identity by embracing morphogenic nuclear structures and self-organizing development (Bottela, 2000). Postmodern constructivism does not focus on the external reality but, on how individuals actively interpret new experiences and transform their prior knowledge. "Objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). Postconstructivist approaches within holistic education aim at creating opportunities for holistic learning, in both formal and non-formal educational settings, and aim at: developing community, communication, social learning, social action, service and spirituality. Within this context, spirituality is seen as a non-dogmatic, open and pluralistic personal way of searching the Deity, as opposed to a pre-determined path to find God, as established by religions and shared by all members of their respected faiths.

Shea (1996) suggests that teachers create a living ecological web of relationships in their classrooms as a means of implementing a more integrated approach to learning. Daily total class planning and evaluation meetings along with class-wide projects enhance the cohesiveness of the classroom community. When Miller (1997) speaks of a community of learners, he immediately opens up the presence of other adults and children as contributors,

comprising a multi-age group. Miller (DATE) concludes that the heart of education consists of dialogue, connection and the mutual creation of meaning.

Bohm (1985b) conducted a series of goalless dialogue groups, (goals, he maintained, limit freedom to explore), as an attempt to minimize thought, (fixed ideas or mental neutrons), and slow down the thinking process (active movement). The resulting creative tension allowed individuals to observe and generate alternative solutions (versus compromise), and develop a common pool of information.

Social psychiatrist, Maxwell Jones (1968) developed an open system for change (recognized by the individual consciously, or in retrospect), through experience in a specific group situation. He listed five general conditions for learning through human interaction: (a) motivated people willing to examine and change their behavior, (b) the development of a group setting, where participants, (c) can communicate freely, (d) confront one another appropriately, and, (e) the presence of a skilled facilitator. Within this social matrix, events occurring in, and out of, the classroom offer opportunities to learn and grow, including changes in consciousness. To enhance self-study, a curriculum is built around studying and taking action, to address a specific social concern, while developing skills. Youth, for instance, comprise an Action Team with older youth as coordinators, and a professional as a learning consultant. The Team then applies program development (stating the problem, analyzing the force field, developing strategies, taking action as change agents, and evaluating undertakings). Action learning strategies include role-playing, data gathering by sampling (questionnaires, interviewing, etc.), together with disseminating and networking findings, (newsletters, new programs, web sites, talk radio/television) (Briggs, 2004). Offering assistance to others enlarges the scope for learning by providing opportunities to interact with people who are different in some respect, either socially, economically, or by age. Peer teaching increases the learning and socialization processes for both tutor and student by

enhancing communication between those who speak the same language (Briggs, 1998). Miller (1997) proposes a setting where children can construct their own understanding, leading to a spiritual approach to education, where the soul or life force unfolds within each child. He suggests that the heart of learning communities is the creation of an open-hearted responsiveness, or teaching presence. Here, teachable moments are recognized and captured for maximum integration.

### **Applications of holistic education**

Seven exemplary projects of applied holistic education are presented that represent its fundamental principles. Two were conducted within public school settings with university collaboration, one in a prison under the auspices of a non-profit organization, another a program in a special educational facility, and an activist, advocacy project, backed up by a university. The sixth, the evolution of a drug rehabilitation program, gives an extraordinary account of the interaction of the three classical educational paradigms with the holistic one. The last example illustrates – from a historical dimension – how holistic thinking underpins the integration of classical educational paradigms at the Department of Orthopedagogics, Ghent University, from its inception until now. In our opinion, these examples, which can be regarded as social-constructivist constructions, all share a common human dedication to strive for ‘improvement’ and ‘good’ solutions for difficult situations (cf. Broekaert et al., 2010).

#### ***Experiential (ghetto) learning.***

A rural ghetto setting was chosen for a primary ungraded school, in Southern California, for 200 Black and Hispanic children coming from economically and socially disadvantaged

homes. Eight Teaching Teams were formed, consisting of a teacher and four paid assistants (parent, high school and college student, and a school-leaver). A weekend retreat of training in interpersonal relationships preceded the project. Children chose the cluster in which they wished to belong. There was no set curriculum; the Teams were free to explore the learning styles and approaches they saw appropriate for their children. Much of the learning took place around small group or individual projects, field trips, and experiential learning. Teams conducted daily planning and evaluation meetings amongst themselves, and with their children. There was a daily two-hour leaderless dialogue group meeting of the entire staff of 47. Content learning was mainly by peer teaching following a pattern of (1) volunteer tutors and students, (2) orientation and planning, including assessment of learning and teaching styles, (3) establishing relationships, (4) exploring relevant methods of teaching, and (5) reviewing and assessing. Each assistant teacher made regular home visits linking the family with the project. A research and training team of two specially trained parolees, a university student and a psychologist, studied the interaction of the Teams and gave their impressions in the various staff meetings. The activities of the teaching assistants varied according to their skills and interests, falling into seven areas: listener, trouble-shooter, companion, supporter, inspirer, linker, and teacher (Briggs, 2004).

### ***Inclusive (delinquency) intervention.***

In a Suburban **blight-area**, near Chicago, a project for 50 Black, delinquent and pre-delinquent adolescents, was conducted on a university campus. (Some had burned down their school the previous year). Employing a program development approach, the youth were taught by university students how to study social problems in their neighbourhood and offer solutions. Skills included interpersonal relationships, observing, listening, data collection (video taped

interviews, questionnaires, etc.), compiling data on computers, and presenting their findings. Teams met daily for planning and evaluation, and members were paid the minimal wage for their participation (Briggs, 2004).

### ***Collaborative (convicted felons) Career Development.***

Eighteen convicted felons, confined in California prisons, were selected to participate in a four-month intensive project, to train them as change agents in education and social services agencies. One half had records of substance abuse, some were diagnosed as mentally retarded, psychopathic, or having behavioral inadequacies. The average IQ was 102. Seven of the prisoners were Black or Hispanic. The crimes ranged from armed robberies and burglaries, to fraud and assault. Many had been previously confined in mental hospitals, prisons or juvenile institutions, some from age eight. Most had been forced out of school, or left of their own accord. A community was formed with study groups (Teams) of two to four prisoners, a university graduate student and a psychologist as a consultant. A curriculum was built around studying projects in the prison that the Teams selected: the prison's school, its therapy groups, types of violence among the prisons' most serious offenders, and the situations that provoked them. They learned to observe, interview, construct questionnaires, compile data and present their findings. In addition to daily community and Team meetings, they began seminars to share and critique their results. They found a former Professor of English, and a Superintendent of Schools, both now confined in prison, who went over their reports, and taught them grammar and composition. A confined artist taught them how to illustrate. They added a seminar on current events, where the university students brought in knowledgeable people to share their experiences and expertise. Upon release from prison, the Teams remained intact and found placements (Grant, 1970).

### ***Emancipative (parents of children with behaviour problems ) actions***

In the Orthopedagogical Observation and Treatment Center (O.O.B.C.), a semi-residential facility and school for special education for children with behavioral and emotional problems in Flanders (Belgium), 65 clients are treated, or supported, (divided into 7 pedagogical units). All the children admitted to the Center show some form of behavioral problems. 80 per cent of the families ask for help with regard to the functioning of the family. 80 per cent of the children have developmental problems, and there is a serious scholastic retardation (usually two years). In the O.O.B.C., a holistic approach is favored. This means that, besides the child psychiatrist, the social worker, the teacher, the educator, the psychologist and the educationalist, the parents also play an important role in the development of the treatment plan of the children. The parents are also involved in the structural and organizational aspects of the school by the discussion of the school program planning and the board (of Directors?). [I don't understand the question mark.] This collaborative effort leads to an emancipation of the parent's position in society, as they better understand the way communities function.

### ***Critical ( activists) Self Advocacy and emancipation.***

In Flanders (Belgium), for some years moving towards a critically engaged approach to disability studies, researchers at the Department of Special Education (University of Ghent, Belgium), are personally involved in an ongoing close collaboration with activist members of the radical self-advocacy and inclusive education movements in Flanders. For some years, the researchers have been moving towards a critically engaged approach to disability studies. They are occupied in an ongoing close collaboration with activist members of the radical self-

advocacy and inclusive education movements in Flanders. A closely-knit group of activists and their allies have recently challenged the disabling society by writing and producing their “Musketeer Book” (Roets et al., 2005). In this book the activists are the self-advocates of their own cause in a society that labels them as persons with a handicap. They discuss their work, home, hopes, dreams, freedoms, friends, good times and bad, resilience, past, present and future. They treat **themselves**, and others, as a topic of investigation that involves an interest in how people make sense of their world, their fears, disappointments, interests and excitements. This is a profoundly social activity, in which, unequal social conditions and relations involved, are identified, understood and critically engaged (Roets et al., 2005).

### *Social and critical transformation of (therapeutic care) institutions*

In 1978, in Belgium, a drug-free hierarchical TC (De Kiem), was started . When one of the founders of the TC gradually withdrew from the community, a new Director was brought in. He had no previous experience in the field of addiction, and was more interested in efficient administrative functioning of the TC, than in the relations between staff (**internal relations**) (**wise decision-making**) [I don't think this is the right format but not sure how to change it.]. Slowly but inevitably a major crisis arose (deconstruction, disintegration – chaos). Whilst the needs of the residents required much flexibility from the staff, and a flexible timetable, the Director became even more rigid in his imposition of a strict timetable (not **integrating** contradictions). Decisions were countered by the staff. Staff members were fired and strikes took place (uncertainty – chaos). Solidarity between old staff members and ex-addicts intensified (**internal relations**). After a hard social fight (deconstruction), a new Board and a new Director was appointed (order out of chaos). The Director was an old colleague and staff member (**internal relations**). A further development of treatment modalities took place. More



importance was attached to family therapy. The old community was expanded, as a program with care facilities for mothers and children, prisoners, adolescents in danger, etc., (new integration and transformation) (Broekaert, 1994).

***The integration of educational paradigms at the Department of Orthopedagogics, Ghent University***

In other publications about the integration of educational paradigms at the Department of Orthopedagogics, the dialectical exchangeability and integration of the three classical knowledge systems was elaborated (Broekaert et al., 2010; Broekaert & De Wilde, 2005; Broekaert et al., 2004). The present article aims at investigating the underlying forces of this integrative dialectical tendency.

The evolution of the Department of Orthopedagogics, Ghent University, from its inception as a Medical Educational Consultation Center for Children until the present day, can be considered as a social-constructivist construction, in which the melting point is situated within educational acting itself.

From 1942 on, the Department of Orthopedagogics was founded as the Medical Educational Consultation Center for Children. It was part of the Institute and Clinic for Mental Illnesses (Instituut en Cliniek der Geesteskrankheden), headed by René Nyssen in the 1930's. Professor Nyssen was a neuro-psychiatrist and sensorialist, and was critical of psychoanalysis. His successor, Prof. Jacques De Busschere, on the other hand, was a psychoanalyst, which clearly underscores the always existing diversity in different theoretical backgrounds at the Department. Prof. De Busschere was succeeded by Prof. Maria Wens, a psychopedagogue influenced by the New School Movement. The diversity in theoretical positions has further developed through the current professors: Eric Broekaert, who primarily studies therapeutic

communities / environments, and Geert Van Hove, who is interested in disability studies and inclusive education – influenced by post-modern theories.

When looking back on this historical evolution, we could consider René Nyssen as a rather ‘conservative’ thinker, although he has published a book (*Textbook of Child Psychiatry and Orthopedagogical Treatment*, 1942), on handicaps and psychiatric ‘defects’, during the Second World War, which demonstrates a clear anti-fascist attitude. Jacques De Busschere, on the other hand, could be characterized as a progressive thinker, adhering to the ‘newly’ emerging psychoanalytical Freudian thoughts. Maria Wens, in her turn, was a more ‘conservative’ reform pedagogue, advocating institutional care. She became the victim of a critical social movement from within her own institution. Yet, her educational ideas, e.g. the importance of the ‘milieu’, lived on in the work of Eric Broekaert on therapeutic communities, and the postmodern thinking of Geert Van Hove. This short history illustrates the dialectical exchangeability and integration of ideas based on holistic thinking (Rucker, 1986). The above mentioned O.O.B.C., for example, which was founded in 1964, and has always been closely connected to the Department of Orthopedagogics, currently has no difficulties in including a large diversity of children (inclusion), acting from a multi-disciplinary point of view.

This example illustrates – from a historical dimension – how holistic thinking underpins the integration of classical educational paradigms at the Department of Orthopedagogics, which leads to considering ‘supposed’ discrepancies as complementary and enriching. In the words of Bohm (1985 **PAGE No**), we could describe this as the underlying flux, the implicate [**Do you mean, 'implicite'? I haven't read the source so don't know.**] order, or ‘*holomovement*’, in which everything is connected, or where “everything is enfolded into everything”.

**Conclusions - *What is relevant for the current field of education and social work ?***

Lorenz (2008) asserts that the social work field in Europe has always been characterized by both, a unification and a diversification tendency. The first aspect, points to a single qualification that allows field workers to be active in different professional areas, including the care for, and support of, persons with intellectual disabilities and people with psychiatric disorders; family work and forensic work, amongst others. The second aspect, indicates a less consolidated social work practice, in which attention is given to methods adapted to, and relevant for, specific regions, countries, target groups, etc.. The first trend could be observed in the recent interest in '*New Public Management*' approaches, such as case management, which coincides with the current focus on evidence-based effectiveness and efficiency. The second tendency leads to a critical re-evaluation of all-embracing social work methods, caused by the observation that social work 'was robbed of its dream of a universal, culture-neutral knowledge base...' (Lorenz, 2008, p. 19). According to Lorenz (2008, p. 20), an important challenge for contemporary social work lies in the critical evaluation of, 'the dialectal tension between "mainstream" and "exceptional" situations and their structural and personal components (Parton, 2004)'. This reflective and reflexive process, (and the different interpretations of reflexivity, cf. Kessl, 2009,) point to some essential elements to consider, i.e. the questioning of the field worker's expert position, and 'the over-emphasis of cognitive aspects and the importance of everyday life patterns' (Kessl, 2009, p. 307).

Postmodern approaches have the potential to consider and 'embrace' multiple realities and are therefore, promising in order to think about this dialectic relation (Ungar, 2004). Although there have been some attempts to describe post-modern practices in social work, the difficult aspect is the lack of guiding principles for practice, except when it comes to advising social workers to engage in dialogue with clients (Ungar, 2004).

In our opinion, a holistic post-modern approach, influenced by poststructuralism and postconstructivism, offers an interesting point of view to critically reflect on the dialectic relationship between unification and diversification in European post-welfare states. which are characterized by ‘the territorialisation of the social sphere, the privatization of services, the implementation of managerialist structures and the establishment of activation policies’ (Kessl, 2009, p. 310). Besides this rather theoretical positioning, the implications of poststructuralism and postconstructivism could - in our opinion - give some indications to the educational and social work practice. These can be summarized in some important principles: open and experience learning, inclusion of the most vulnerable, critical and social emancipation, collaborative efforts and self advocacy.

Open and experience learning is based on using one’s own experiences, (both individually and in groups), to supplement classic teaching methods to generate knowledge and insight. In this respect, Miller (1997) believes that education flows from experience, which is an essential principle of holistic education. Inclusion of the most vulnerable goes beyond the normalization and integration principles, in a sense that people with social or learning disabilities are considered as human beings who should belong to society, in which they should be able to participate as everybody else (Van Loon & Van Hove, 2001). Instead of adapting oneself to society and universal norms (integration), differences are accepted and diversity is fully respected and embraced (inclusion). Critical and social emancipation reacts against labeling, victimization, stigmatization, classification and (large-scale) institutionalization, aiming at the promotion of quality of life, basic rights, self-determination and de-institutionalization (Broekaert et al., 2004). People with disabilities are no longer reduced to their impairments, but are considered as people who can make autonomous choices (Van Loon & Van Hove, 2001). From this point of view, they are involved in all decision-

making processes which could potentially affect the various aspects of their life. In this context, several self-advocate organizations have been developed internationally, which aim at challenging society and its discriminating and oppressing attitudes and practices (Roets et al., 2004).

In this way of thinking, the poststructuralist and the postconstructivist positions, commonly, are based on an alternate way of working that focuses on inclusion of the most vulnerable of society, collaboration between teachers and students / social workers and clients and emancipation, and self-advocacy of the individual and mankind. The principles of complementarity, integration, uncertainty, and transformation characterize the emerging holistic paradigm. It embraces a different philosophy, one in which new learning emerges, whereby the individual is transformed by his organic interconnection with the totality of mankind and nature: the dialogue of the living person reconsidering his Ego while becoming part of the cosmic condition.

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